Air Force Flight Test Center Environmental Management

Fact Sheet

October 2002

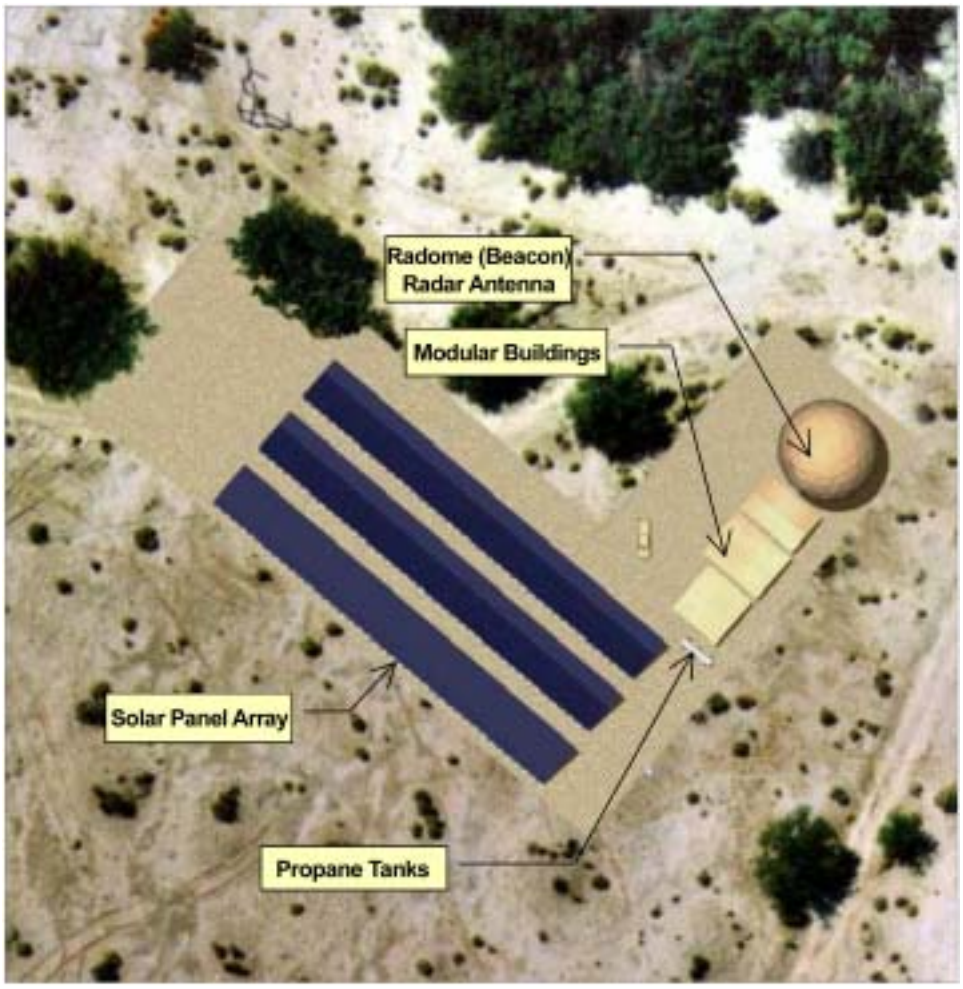
Air Force Proposes Radar System for Saline Valley

The Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards Air Force Base (AFB) is proposing to construct a beacon radar system and an associated microwave repeater facility on non-wilderness lands within the Saline Valley. Once built, the facility will become part of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) radar network.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed project is to increase flight safety. The system would provide air traffic controllers and pilots with real-time flight data within the Saline Valley area and other information that would assist in aircraft identification and search and rescue operations.

The Saline Valley's geography and remoteness create a void in radar coverage below an altitude of about 8,000 feet. Military and civilian aircraft often fly below that altitude. The area has a history of aircraft near collisions and an ongoing potential for collisions in the future.



Conceptual Site Plan

Location and Scope of the Project

The proposed beacon radar and microwave repeater site would be located within or near the Saline Valley. The Saline Valley is located in Inyo County east of Owens Valley and west of Death Valley. The majority of the Saline Valley lies within Death Valley National Park. There are several locations under consideration for the proposed action — five radar sites and three repeater sites.

Description of Proposed Action

The proposed beacon radar facility would be self-contained and unmanned. It would run primarily on solar power with a propane-powered engine generator on site as a backup. This is necessary since there are no utility power lines in the area.

A beacon radar system sends out a radio interrogator signal, which communicates with a radio or transponder in an aircraft, and the aircraft then sends a signal back. The radar facility would be powered by a 75-kilowatt solar

system. The beacon interrogator itself would transmit a 150-watt signal.

The proposal also includes construction of a small, solar-powered microwave repeater site. The repeater site would have a footprint of approximately 4 to 6 feet on a side and would stand on a tower about 40 feet high. A 6- to 10-foot diameter microwave antenna would be mounted on the repeater tower.

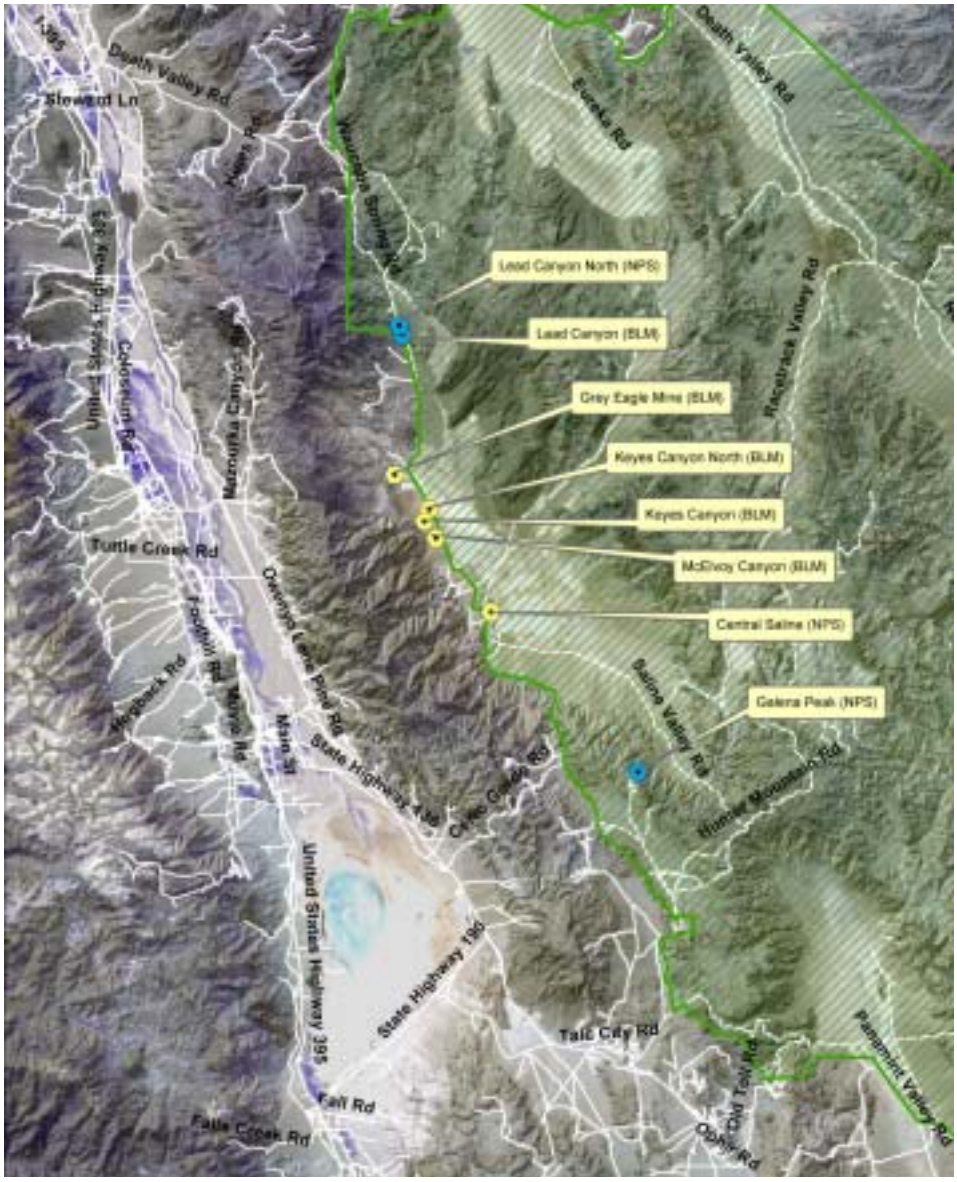
The repeater is required to provide continuous communication to an already existing FAA communications complex on Keeler Peak. The Keeler Peak complex will then route the radar data to air traffic controllers at Edwards AFB. The facility would consist of several removable, modular structures; an array of low-lying solar panels; and a rotating radar antenna, which would sit on a tower less than 40 feet tall. The entire facility would lie in an area less than 1 acre.

Public Concerns and Issues

Public comments are being sought. A response to public input will be incorporated into the Environmental Assessment (EA) being prepared for the project.

The document is part of the Environmental Impact Analysis Process which identifies potential environmental impacts on the physical, natural, and human environment associated with the implementation of this proposal. The resulting analysis and documentation is intended to comply with the provisions of the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act.

When completed, copies of the draft EA will be available upon request, at local libraries and the Edwards AFB web site.



Legend

Death Valley National Park

Site Type

Radar Alternatives

Repeater Alternatives

Candidate Site Locations

0 3 6 12 18 24 Miles

N

Public comments and concerns may be presented in writing to:

Air Force Flight Test Center
Environmental Management
Attn: Gary Hatch Environmental Public Affairs
5 E. Popson Ave.
Edwards AFB, CA 93524
e-mail – gary.hatch@edwards.af.mil
fax (661) 277-6145.